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PARENT-CHILD INTERACTION AND VOCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT--A REVIEW OF THEORY AND RESEARCH.

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RESEARCH ON THE EFFECT OF PARENT-CHILD INTERACTION UPON VOCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IS REVIEWED. SEVERAL STUDIES SUPPORT BORDIN'S PROPOSAL THAT A CHILD'S VOCATIONAL INTERESTS WOULD BE AFFECTED BY IDENTIFICATION WITH HIS PARENTS, BUT AS EACH STUDY DIFFERED IN METHODS AND SAMPLES, NO SIGNIFICANT CONCLUSIONS COULD BE REACHED. STUDIES WHICH TESTED ROE'S HYPOTHESIS THAT CHOICE OF OCCUPATION BY PERSON OR NONPERSON ORIENTATION IS AFFECTED BY FAMILY PATTERNS SHOWED NEGATIVE RESULT. THIS INDICATED THE DIFFICULTY OF CATEGORIZING FAMILY ATTITUDES ON THE BASIS OF RETROSPECTIVE DATA AND ALSO SUGGESTED AN ERROR IN ROE'S OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORIES. A GROUP OF STUDIES WHICH ANALYZED THE FAMILY BACKGROUND OF EMINENT AND SUCCESSFUL MEN IS ALSO DISCUSSED. SOME OF THESE STUDIES SUPPORT ROE'S HYPOTHESIS THROUGH THE CORRELATION OF DIFFERENT FAMILY PATTERNS WITH DIFFERENT OCCUPATIONS, BUT CONCLUSIONS DID NOT APPLY TO THE GENERAL POPULATION. FUTURE RESEARCH IN THIS AREA MUST BE BASED UPON MORE SOPHISTICATED DESCRIPTIONS AND CATEGORIZATIONS OF OCCUPATIONS AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS. THIS ARTICLE WAS PUBLISHED IN "PERSPECTIVES ON COUNSELING," VOLUME 1, NUMBER 1, SPRING 1966, AN OCCASIONAL JOURNAL PUBLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE GRADUATE SCHOOL. (NS)

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CONTENTS

THE DIRECTIVE LESS-DIRECTIVE DICHOTOMY AS VIEWED FROM THE CONCEPT OF LINGUISTIC RELATIVITY by John W. McCarthy Page 1

PARENT CHILD INTERACTION AND VOCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A REVIEW OF THEORY AND RESEARCH by Alan E. White Page 13

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CONCEPT OF EMPATHY by John F. Stohrer Page 26

THE MAKING OF A COUNSELOR, STEP ONE: RE-EDUCATION by Rev. Kenneth F. Kieffer, O.F.M. Page 36

FOREWORD

There exists a tendency to value only the writings of established experts as having relevance and meaning in our professional world. This is unfortunate, since the person involved in the educational process of becoming a counselor often possesses a refreshing perspective on some of the fundamental issues surrounding the art and science of counseling.

It is the purpose of this occasional journal to share and give exposition to some of these significant writings so that their value will not be lost in the musty files of the ivory tower.

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PARENT-CHILD INTERACTION AND VOCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A REVIEW OF THEORY AND RESEARCH

by
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The effect of different parent-child relations upon the development of personality has been extensively dealt with in both theory and research. With regard to theory, the more recent writings have shown a departure from the strict Freudian formulations and concerned themselves with the interaction of parent and child. Sullivan[1], for example, points to the transmission of anxiety from the mother to the infant as being the most important contributing factor in later interpersonal difficulties. Erikson[2] sees the socialization of the child related to his feelings of trust or mistrust acquired through early interaction with his parents. Mowrer[3], in a synthesis of Freudian and Pavlovian theories, sees inadequate socialization as being the result of faulty or incomplete parental training with respect to conscience and ethical values.

With regard to research, Coleman's text[4] on abnormal psychology reveiws studies done on pathogenic family patterns, such as overprotection, overindulgence, and faulty discipline, and their ultimate effect on the personality development of the child.

Theoretical Developments

The effect of different parent-child relationships upon vocational development, however, was, to my knowledge, first theorized by Bordin[5] who proposed that one's vocational interests would be affected by his identification (or lack of it) with his parents.

Fourteen years later, Roe[6] stated more formally that certain types of family patterns would affect one's orientation to persons, that certain occupations could be categorized in terms of person or non-person orientation, and that one could predict the type of occupation that a person would enter by identifying the parental attitudes present in his early childhood. For example, a person whose parents were neglecting would have a non-person orientation and would choose an occupation in technology, whereas a person from a loving family would have an orientation toward persons and would choose a service occupation such as social work. Super[7] also considered the psychological aspects of vocational development and stressed not only the child's identification with his parents, but also his introjection of family values as being significant in vocational interest and choice.

I would now like to discuss the research in this area, and for this purpose, I have divided it into three groups according to certain evident similarities.

Research - Interest and Identification

The first group related to Bordin's proposal,[8] deals with studies concerned with the relationship between students' vocational interests and parental identification.

Although making no direct correlation between interest and identification, Tyler[9] noted masculine role behavior in first grade boys as reflected by masculine interests and suggested that role identification had taken place. Steimel and Suzeidelis,[10] however, studied a group of college males using a retrospective attitude scale, and found that interest in masculine occupations, such as

engineering or aviation, tended to be related to identification with the father. White[11] found that among thirty-four college girls, there was a definite correlation between feminine interest and parental identification as measured by the congruency between students' actual and ideal self and between their parents' perception of actual child and ideal child. Brunkhan,[12] however, in a study of undergraduate males, found no correlation between differences in either possible or probable occupational choice and difference in parental identification. His method, however, was slightly different from White's, as he did not measure the parents' perceptions of ideal and actual child, but rather the students' perception of ideal and actual parent.

A slightly different approach was used by Segal.[13] While the above studies used relatively objective techniques and sampled the general student population, Segal used the Rorschach test on students in accounting and students in creative writing. He found that accounting students tended to show a more rigid identification with their fathers, while those in creative writing tended to show a more flexible identification.

It is rather difficult to reach any significant conclusions regarding these studies since the method varied in each case, as did the sample - if not in kind, then in number. Although Brunkhan,[14] in discussing the difference between his results and Segal's, suggests that the difference may be due primarily to method, positive results have been obtained with Q-sorts and attitude scales. White's positive findings may indicate the importance of parental perceptions,

but it is difficult to generalize not only because of the limited size of her sample, but also because this sample can hardly be considered as representative of the general student population. The latter comment would in fact apply to all of the above studies.

A theory related to Bordin's might be Super's proposal[15] that family-delivered values influence occupational development. Kahl[16] has shown that family influence is related to willingness to go to college among working-class high school students, and Kinnane and Pable[17] have shown that students tend to reflect their families' work values. There has been, however, seemingly no attempt to correlate these values with specific occupational orientation. It would be interesting, for example, to study possible relationships between people identified as having creative values and their occupational interest and final choice.

Research - Roe's Hypothesis

In the second major group of studies are those concerned with testing Roe's hypothesis.[18]

Grigg[19] studied twenty women in nursing graduate school and another twenty doing graduate work in science. He found no significant difference in questionnaire answers regarding early family experience. Roe's own comment[20] to this was that nurses who return to graduate school are more likely to be scientifically oriented.

Hagen's study[21] of 248 men was more extensive, involving an 18 year longitudinal study which included a complete file of vocational data in addition to retrospective attitude data. He also found no relation between occupational choice and perceived family attitudes. Brunkhan,[22] using only retrospective attitude data as correlated to probable choice, found the same negative result.

Roe[23] realized that there were problems with the theory, specifically with the categories of family attitudes and occupations. Using a much less rigid approach, she found support for her hypothesis that the person orientation of her subjects (students and working adults) was related to childhood experience. She found that her occupational categories were inaccurate, and that the choice of, say, engineering was not the result of a desire to avoid personal contacts, as she had previously theorized. With regard to categories of family attitudes, she found support for her new hypothesis that proposed that a child from a rejecting background may seek jobs with an orientation toward persons in the hope of filling unsatisfied needs. She also found that early social experience with peer groups was an important factor in orientation.

These studies seem to indicate that regardless of the size of the sample, the nature of the sample, or method of observation, a rigid hypothesis attempting to specifically categorize family background on the basis of retrospective attitude data, and correlate this with specific occupations, is going to produce negative results. Hagen[24] suggests that perhaps it is not the total atmosphere that is important, but the extent to which one or the other parent and child interact. He also suggests that we might study the child's defensive or non-defensive responses to the atmosphere rather than the atmosphere itself. Brunkhan[25] suggests that research focus on choice rather than attitudes as the variable, and that occupations should be grouped according to function.

Research - Eminent Men

The third, and I believe most interesting, category includes studies dealing with men committed to and successful in their chosen occupations.

Roe studied the lives of eminent biologists[26] and psychologists[27] with relation to their family history, their own contribution to their field, and their responses to various projective techniques, such as the Rorschach. She found that the biologists tended to come from families characterized by lack of warmth. The psychologists and anthropologists, however, tended to come from families with a prevalent atmosphere of overprotection, which in turn led to feelings of resentment and rebelliousness on the part of the subjects.

Cambor, et. al.,[28] in a psychoanalytically-oriented study of thirty top-ranking creative jazz musicians, found that the selection of music as an occupation was, for these men, a means of finding self-expression previously denied by strict family discipline. These men tended to come from a home dominated by an over protective and demanding mother who acted in the absence of an adequate father-figure.

Nachmann,[29] and a few months later Galinsky,[30] studied only men who indicated that they were emotionally committed to their work. Those who entered an occupation for reasons of prestige or financial gain were eliminated. They both proposed that different occupations were characterized by certain types of behavior which satisfied different personality needs, and they saw these needs as being developed in early parent-child relationships. Consequently, they proposed that people emotionally committed to different occupations would show different family patterns. The results, obtained in both studies through interviews by experienced clinicians, showed this to be true. Among Nachmann's findings were that those in the field of law, an occupation characterized by what she calls verbal aggression and a concern

for human justice, tended to come from families in which the father was the authority in both word and deed. Those in social work, an occupation which does not permit the display of any sort of aggression, tended to report inadequate or insecure fathers and showed evidence of having experienced severe deprivation before the age of two. Roe[31] supports these findings with regard to social workers, and suggests that the farther from the cultural sex stereotype a given occupation is (social work not being considered a masculine occupation), the more likely it is that there have been particular pressures in the early histories predisposing such a choice.[32] Galinsky, studying clinical psychologists and physicists, gives support to Roe's earlier findings[33, 34] and found that clinical psychologists tended to have warmer relationships with their mother than did the physicists.

From these studies, then, it can be concluded that among men who are successful and/or emotionally committed to their occupations, parental attitudes as perceived by the subject in retrospect, have been observed to have been different for various occupations. This seems to suggest also that Roe's hypothesis[35,36] might be valid for eminent, successful, and committed men, but conclusions cannot be made regarding the general population. There is also no evidence to explain reasons for one man's choosing law and another's physics (both tend to report coming from families in which the father was a strong central fiture), nor is there evidence to explain the difference in individuals who, for example, choose social work over psychology or music (subjects studied in these occupations tended to report the importance of the mother in early childhood).

Harris' work,[37] dealing with famous philosophers, writers, scientists, and political figures, deserves mention here as it is both extensive, covering the lives and writings of hundreds of men, and unique. He theorized, after studying these men, that differences in birth order result in different parent child relationships, and that these differences are apparent in the thought, action, life aims, and self-concept of these men. For example, he found that an inner moral authority developed through intense parental indoctrination was a characteristic of first sons, and he cites the lives and writings of such eminent first sons as Freud, William James, Kant, Jonathan Swift, and Walter Lippman. Later sons, on the other hand, have a less intense relationship with their parents, and tend to think of morality as being externally exposed. He found this characteristic to be true of men like Adler, Tolstoy, Kafka, and Walt Whitman.

For Harris, then, different parent child relationships would not result in different occupations, but in different ways of thinking and acting within a given occupation, this difference being the result of birth order.

Conclusions

From all of these studies dealing with occupational choice and/or interest and parent-child relationships, it can be concluded that:

Among students, there is no clear or conclusive evidence that difference in occupational interest has a relationship to differences in parental attitude and identification as defined in the various studies.

Among men committed to or successful in their chosen occupation, all of the evidence available suggests that early parent child interaction was important, if not in determining the choice of an actual occupation, then in the development of behavior patterns which facilitate performance, and personality needs which receive satisfaction within the chosen occupation.

It is difficult to generalize further, because each piece of research differed, if not in purpose, then in method. It is interesting to note that most of the research done with students used relatively objective paper and pencil techniques (with the notable exception of Segal[38]), while research dealing with eminent or committed men included, or used exclusively, projective techniques, clinical interviews, or a study of writings and biographical data - all relatively subjective approaches. It might prove significant for for research to be done reversing this procedure.

There are several other areas in which further research might be done, as well as problems within each of these areas.

First, research could attempt a more sophisticated categorization of occupations according to function. Fine[39] has already attempted to do this, but it seems that there should be more of an emphasis on personality dimensions, which in turn must be defined and quantified. Also, occupations are not only changing with increased advances in technology, but the same occupation may vary because of differences in situational and personal factors.

Secondly, research could concern itself with further sophistication in the description and analysis of parent-child relationships. The complexity of the situation is illustrated by Coleman.[40]

> The exact effects of faulty parent-child relationships on later behavior depend on many factors, including the age of the child, the constitutional and personality make-up of the child at the time, the duration and degree of the unhealthy relationship, his perception of the relationship, and the total family setting and life context, including the presence of absence of alleviating conditions, and whether or not subsequent experiences tend to reinforce or correct early damage.

The complexity increases when we consider factors outside the family situation which may effect vocational development, and it increases even further in trying to correlate these occupations, regardless of how they are considered. This is indicative of the gap between theory and research, in that theory, while making relevant generalizations about human behavior as a whole, does not take into account the situational and personal factors which seem to vary with each individual. On the other hand, research involves so many restrictions in its attempt to control certain variables that it is almost impossible to generalize from it.

It would seem, as Rogers [41] puts it, that as research progresses we become more aware of the uniqueness of the individual. Both theory and research, then, wishing to emphasize vocational development as it relates to parent-child interaction, should become increasingly concerned with how these factors operate in and effect the individual human being.

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